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ABSTRACT

Describes the development, format, and content of a new faculty orientation and mentoring program. The orientation program targets immediate information concerning employment and getting started in the classroom, while the mentoring program provides peer support for the duration of the employee's first years of service. The initiative is divided into three stages: (1) the initiation phase in which the orientation takes place; (2) the cultivation phase in which proteges become more involved in college activities; and (3) the redefinition phase when proteges become more self-sufficient and self-confident in their instructional role. Institutional outcomes associated with the mentoring program include a sense of being valued, feeling more productive, and having greater job satisfaction. Group outcomes include tranquility among instructors and greater collaboration within the discipline, within the division, across disciplines, and across the college. Outcomes for the institution include retaining new faculty longer, collegial networking, professional growth, and increased institutional effectiveness. This document also provides information concerning the format and content of a separate adjunct orientation and mentoring program. The paper's recommendations for smooth program operation include the early identification of participants (both mentors and proteges) and the development of a concise orientation program format. (RC)

ADJUNCT FACULTY ORIENTATION AND MENTORING: DEVELOPING AND RETAINING THE BEST!

By

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Introduction

Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) is one of twenty-three colleges comprising the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) and serves as the flagship institution of the system. It is the third largest college and the second largest *multi-campus* community college in the nation. The college consists of five campuses, with a planned sixth campus for medical education that will open in fall 2003. NVCC enrolls more than 60,000 students every academic year, which translates to over 24,000 full-time equivalent students (FTES) per year. In 2002 the *Chronicle of Higher Education* named NVCC the most diverse institution of higher education in the nation. Fifty-three percent of the students are Caucasian, 16% are African-American, 13% are Asian, 10% are Hispanic, and 2% are Native American. Over 90% of NVCC students are residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

NVCC's faculty is large, considering the number of student enrollments instruction at the college generates. The institution is thirty-five years old and has an aging faculty, more than 35% of whom are within retirement age. The academic deans at the college became concerned about the large number of new instructors that would be employed over the next few years to replace retiring faculty, both full-time and adjunct.

Identifying the Program

The Academic Deans Council, made up of the 16 deans from the five campuses, identified two phases of a program for new faculty that they wanted to develop – an orientation program that takes place at the beginning of the employment period and a mentoring program that continues over a period of time during the early employment

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years. The deans decided to create a new faculty orientation and mentoring program for full-time instructors as the first project. They identified both seasoned master teachers and relatively new instructors to serve on a task force to develop the orientation and mentoring program. The orientation program would be imbedded in the entire mentoring program. The purpose of the orientation and mentoring program, as created by the faculty task force, was to make the transition of "learning the ropes" of the academic institution and of the state-wide system easier for new instructors. The orientation program targets immediate information concerning employment and getting started in the classroom while the mentoring program provides peer support for the duration of the employee's first years of service. The mentoring program prepares new instructors for advancement as they continue their professional development and increase their years of experience.

Program Rationale

From the literature in the field (Kram & Brager, 1992; Merriam & Zeph, 1987; Welch, 1997; and Wunsch & Johnsrud, 1992), educators know that there are two aspects to effective mentoring relationships: professional support that orients the new instructor to the institution, and personal support that sponsors the new instructor as a member of the collegial team. Some examples of professional support that the new instructor receives in the NVCC program include sponsoring instructors in college-wide instructional forums, introducing new instructors to others at their campus and at other campuses college-wide, coaching and protecting them as they begin their instructional career, and helping them identify challenging instructional assignments. Personal support (support in the professional role) enhances a new instructor's sense of competence. Personal support helps them clarify their role in the classroom and in the academic division. It also assists them in becoming effective members of the college faculty. Examples of personal-support functions in the NVCC program that mentor colleagues provide for new faculty include serving as a role model, providing acceptance and confirmation of instructional effectiveness, acting when needed as a professional counselor, and being a friend.

Once Northern Virginia Community College created a formal mentoring program for its new full-time faculty, academic deans determined the match between the mentor and the new instructor/protégé, and the college defined a specific length of time for formal orientation and mentoring activities. The deans, as a group, decided to focus their mentor/protégé matches by division and campus, then by discipline. When there was no discipline match, the dean assigned a mentor/protégé by a closely related academic discipline. Deans favored identifying senior faculty for the mentoring role who genuinely wanted to participate in the program.

Deans divided the orientation and mentoring program into three phases or stages: the initiation phase in which the orientation takes place; the cultivation phase in which protégés become more involved in college activities as they learn to navigate through the new system; and the redefinition phase when protégés become more self-sufficient

and self-confident in the instructional role. As the orientation and mentoring program supports the new instructor, the program also strengthens the institution by improving college communication in three ways. The new instructors make friends right away and build a college-wide network. The protégés and the mentors who may not have known each other prior to this assignment acquaint themselves and build a local, campus network. The program also strengthens the professional relationship among the protégé, the mentor and their supervising dean.

Besides strengthening institutional communication, there are additional personal and institutional outcomes of the mentoring program. Individual outcomes for the new instructors include a sense of being valued, more productivity on the part of the instructor, and greater job satisfaction. Group outcomes include tranquility among instructors and greater collaboration within the discipline, the division, across the disciplines, and across the college. Outcomes for the institution include retaining new faculty longer, collegial networking and better interaction, professional growth and development, and ultimately increased instructional effectiveness.

Senior faculty who serve as mentors have noted that the faculty orientation program provides them an additional opportunity to network among colleagues across the disciplines. Mentors also become publicly recognized instructional leaders and master teachers when they are nominated for the role. Several of the senior faculty have volunteered multiple years to serve as mentors for new instructors because they had such a positive experience.

Creating the New Adjunct Orientation and Mentoring Program

After two successful years of implementation of the new full-time faculty orientation and mentoring program, the Academic Deans Council decided to develop a parallel New Adjunct Faculty Orientation and Mentoring program. The first step was to identify a task force made up of 15 full-time faculty who had served as mentors for adjunct faculty and 15 relatively new and senior adjunct faculty at the college. The participants were identified from all five campuses and across the academic disciplines at the college. The task force met one entire day to identify the ideal orientation program for new adjunct faculty, the information to be included in the orientation and mentoring program, and the conditions for delivering the program.

The results of the task force were specific. The required orientation meeting was to be located on each campus for maximum convenience of the adjuncts. It was to be held on a week night or a weekend to maximize attendance. The meeting was to last no longer than two hours. The task force challenged administrators to concentrate the most important information to impart to new adjunct instructors in a reasonable period of time. The task force identified such information as college, campus and division policies; the academic calendar; an orientation to the physical facilities; an explanation of the college administrative structure; state policies on sexual harassment; and emergency and technical support services for dissemination at the mandatory

orientation meeting. Other critical information about best teaching practices, instructional policies, student services, college maps and campus locations, professional development opportunities, and human resource benefits was to be made available to the new adjuncts in the form of a CD-ROM that they could review whenever they felt the need and in a time and place of their own convenience.

Additional activities that the task force recommended to the deans were to identify a point of contact at the college human resources office to answer adjunct questions about payroll and benefits, to create a wallet-sized emergency information card that adjuncts could refer to in the event of a classroom emergency outside of office hours, and to hold round-table meetings mid-semester with senior administrators so that adjuncts could discuss issues and problems that arise during the academic year.

Fall 2002 is the first implementation of the new adjunct faculty orientation and mentoring program. Each campus and division will hold its own new adjunct faculty orientation program prior to the first day of classes in August. The meeting is mandatory and included in the teaching contract. During the first two weeks of the semester senior full-time faculty or adjuncts will be assigned to mentor new adjunct faculty. Throughout the fall semester mentors and protégés will participate in prescribed activities: visitation and follow-up discussion of mentors and protégés in each other's classrooms; initiation of at least two contacts between mentors and protégés to discuss policies, instructional questions and/or administrative issues; and a verification that the protégé has copies of college and division policies and procedures. In subsequent semesters there are no formal activities with the mentors and protégés, but the hope is that the initial semester's worth of required activities will cement a future professional relationship that will extend for many years.

Critical Tasks for Smooth Program Delivery

The critical element for delivery of either of the faculty mentoring programs at NVCC is the timeliness of the information needed to deliver the activities. First and foremost is the identification of the new adjunct faculty. The deans make every attempt to hire adjuncts in advance so that both the institution and the individual instructor have time to make sound plans for the instructional program. Unfortunately, the ideal and the actual are not one in the same. Those adjuncts who are hired at the last hour before classes begin often get "lost in the institutional cracks." The earlier the new instructors can be identified and included in the orientation program, the better are the results of the program and the new adjunct's first organizational experience.

Another critical issue in the program is a timely identification of the seasoned mentors for the new adjunct instructors. Occasionally, and in certain disciplines, there are so many new adjuncts that there are not enough full-time instructors to mentor them. NVCC has turned to senior adjuncts to increase the pool of potential mentors for new adjuncts. Identifying senior adjuncts to serve in this capacity has been beneficial, not only for the new adjunct protégés who profit from the experience of the senior adjunct

mentor, but also for the senior adjuncts who are placed in a revered position because of their professional body of knowledge.

The third critical task is to plan a meaningful orientation program for the new adjuncts. The developmental task force challenged NVCC deans to deliver their orientation program in two hours or less and to cover a specific list of topics. In order to do so, the deans have focused their programming to cover the most critical issues to the divisions and the college. The deans use the time allotted to accomplish the maximum without wasting either words or time.

Financing an Orientation and Mentoring Program

NVCC was able to finance both task force developmental stages for its faculty orientation and mentoring programs. The institution allocated \$5000 for each task force. Task force participants were paid a \$100 stipend for their service. The remainder of the funds was used to provide food for the meetings. While the deans felt that compensation for the task force service was a must, those who participated said that the task force activities were such a positive experience, they would have done so without compensation. The adjuncts who participated in the development of the adjunct faculty program were especially pleased to have been asked to contribute. The experience of sharing ideas and suggestions, of being listened to, and of being taken seriously was so important that the adjuncts suggested the specific orientation and mentoring activity of the roundtable discussions once a semester.

Other funding that has been used in support of the delivery of the orientation and mentoring program has been limited to the development and duplication of the CD-ROM with institutional information. NVCC chose to pay the graphics designers to work on weekends to complete the project in a shorter period of time. However, had the institution been willing to develop the CD over a longer period of time, the development and design effort could have been subsumed in the normal workload of the division responsible for this type of work. The college also paid an outside firm to mass duplicate the CDs, but this too could have been completed in house over a longer period of time.

Ultimately, any institution can develop a faculty orientation and mentoring program for little money if there is broad-based cooperation among the various departments and divisions already established in the organizational structure. The developmental process itself can be an exercise in team building for an organization, an activity whose outcomes go far beyond the goal of the project - that of attracting and retaining qualified adjuncts for the institution.

How to Begin an Orientation and Mentoring Program

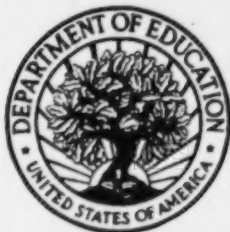
Here are five steps to follow so that any institution can develop a meaningful faculty orientation and mentoring program.

1. Define the institution's personnel problem. Are many full-time faculty retiring? Is it difficult to attract and retain qualified adjuncts over a long period of time? Is there one particular discipline that requires more adjuncts than the surrounding community can provide?
2. Create a group to determine the orientation modules and the mentoring guidelines. In other words, identify your task force members who will develop the orientation and mentoring program. One of the reasons why NVCC's programs are so successful is because they are programs for faculty created by faculty and facilitated by administrators.
3. Identify funding for the program, or no-cost incentives, or a combination of the two. Individual institutions can be creative in determining how to reward participants.
4. Deliver the program. As soon as the task force has finished its work, execute the program at the earliest possible opportunity. Ideas of this nature can become stale or can be overtaken by events.
5. Assess and assess to improve and strengthen the program. Once an institution has delivered the initial program, participants can help identify the best and the worst of what was planned. Get rid of the worst or modify it to make it useful. Enhance the best, and the program's reputation will keep it going.

NVCC has created a web site where the college publishes information about its New Faculty Orientation and Mentoring Program and its New Adjunct Faculty Orientation and Mentoring Program. The address is <http://www.nvcc.edu/woodbridge/chdivision/Orientation/FacOrientation.htm>. Readers are welcome to visit the site often, as it is continually updated with improvements made to the existing programs as a result of assessment and evaluation.

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